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ABSTRACT

Of the more than 2 million Spanish-surnamed students enrolled in the public elementary and secondary schools, more than 70% are located in the five Southwestern states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, and of these more than 95% are Mexican Americans. However, in all five Southwestern states the proportion of Chicano students to Anglo students decreases at every level, due mainly to the higher attrition and dropout rate for Chicanos than for Anglos. Two key resources are recommended to those interested in understanding the Chicano experience in schools. First is Thomas Carter's "Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect," and the second is a set of six reports published between 1970 and 1974 by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Four other publications are briefly noted in this paper. Results of research in the literature are discussed in the areas of achievement, self concept, aspirations, and bilingual/bicultural education of Chicanos. The basic conclusion reached is that the literature available is minimal, inferior in quantity and quality, and falls far short of providing a basis for comprehensive assessment of the problems in Chicano education or a basis for formulation of policies to ameliorate these problems. (AN)

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SCHOOLING IN THE BORDERLANDS: NEGLECT, INEQUALITY AND CULTURAL CONFLICT*

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1979

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THE SETTING

Well over two million Spanish-surnamed students are enrolled in the public elementary and secondary schools of the continental United States.[1] More than 70 percent of these pupils are located in the five Southwestern (borderland) states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. The overwhelming majority (over 95 percent) of Spanish-surnamed students in these borderland states are Mexican Americans.

It is estimated that over eight million students attend elementary and secondary schools in the Southwest (see Table 1). Seventeen percent of these students are Mexican American.[2] Of these Chicano students, over 80 percent are enrolled in two U.S.-Mexico borderland states, California and Texas. Almost 50 percent are found in California alone.

(Table 1 about here)

Figure 1 presents the primary concentrations of Chicano students in the Southwest. In Arizona and Texas, in particular, the concentration of Mexican-American pupils is literally a U.S.-Mexico borderland phenomenon. In Texas, approximately two-thirds of the total Jhicano enrollment in the state is located along the Mexican border. In Arizona, 55 percent of the Chicano students are located in the southern part of the state along the border. In the other states Mexican American students are somewhat more widely dispersed although major concentrations are found in urban centers (e.g., Los Angeles, San Jose, Denver, Pueblo, Albuquerque).

(Figure 1 about here)

In all five Southwestern States the proportion of Chicano students decreases at every level; from elementary through secondary enrollments. Table 2 presents the overall enrollment breakdowns for the Southwest. As

we can see, the proportion of Mexican-American enrollment decreases from 18.6 percent at the elementary grades to 16 percent at the junior high level to 14.8 percent at the senior high level. Note that the Black enrollment also decreases the higher one moves in the educational system. Although the data are not presented in this table the same pattern holds for Native Americans in the borderlands. On the other hand, the proportion of Anglo enrollment increases at every level, 68.8 percent to 71.6 percent to 75.3 percent.

(Table 2 about here)

Three factors have been identified as having major responsibility for the higher proportion of Chicano students in the lower grades and the larger proportion of Anglo students in the upper grades: 1) higher birth-rates for Mexican Americans than for Anglos, thus more young Chicanos in the primary grades; 2) a higher rate of grade repetition for Mexican-American than for Anglo students, particularly in the early years of elementary school; and 3) a higher attrition and dropout rate for Chicanos than for Anglos, especially at the intermediate and secondary levels. Of these three factors the most significant is the higher attrition and dropout rates for Chicanos than for Anglos. It is in the junior and senior high schools that the educational system takes its most damaging toll in terms of numbers on minority students (Chicanos, Native Americans and Blacks) in the borderlands.

The situation outlined above represents the current bleak picture of education in the Southwest and although it is a well known and accepted fact that the Chicano (and Native American) experience in schools is problematic on various dimensions (e.g., language, culture, socioeconomic

status), relatively little research exists in this area. As will become apparent upon reading this essay, the Chicano experience in education has not been totally ignored, but there still exists considerable room for improvement.

KEY RESOURCES

There are two pieces of work which are essential to anyone interested in understanding the Chicano experience in schools. The first is Thomas Carter's Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect published in 1970. The second is a set of six reports published between 1970 and 1974 by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and which are available from the Superintendent of Documents in Washington, D.C. Both of these materials are important resources for teachers, researchers and anyone else interested in this topic.

Carter's book is by far the best text dealing with this topic. It's the best not only because of the content and quality, but also through default. That is, there really aren't any other books competing, making it one of a kind. In any case, I highly recommend this text. Carter, a sociologist, discusses a wide range of topics and covers them thoroughly. Discussions of problematic issues are related to the existing research. For example, topics analyzed include: the academic achievement of Chicano vs. other groups, the effects of bilingualism on educational performance, self-concept, poverty, segregation, cultural factors, failure of the schools as opposed to failure of the culture, intellectual capacity, and other related issues. Carter's book is useful at various levels: high school, college, (both undergraduate and graduate courses, specifically teacher training courses), research, and in general to anyon interested in learning

about this ethnic group's experience with the educational system. Carter presents the material in a style easily understandable to newcomers, yet relating the issues to research in a manner interesting to advanced students.

The six reports published between 1970 and 1974 are the result of an extensive five-year Mexican American Education Study directed and executed by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. This series of reports offers, by far, the most comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of opportunities available to Chicano students in the public schools of the borderlands.

Each of the six reports examines a different aspect of the Chicano experience in education in the Southwest. Briefly, the first, Ethnic Isolation of Mexican Americans in the Public Schools of the Southwest, studies the extent to which Chicano students experience segregation in schools, and the low representation of Chicanos as teachers, school administrators, and school board members. The Commission concludes that: 1) Chicano students are isolated by school districts and within districts by schools, 2) Chicanos are underrepresented at every level of administration (school, district, board of education); and 3) most Chicano staff are found in predominantely Chicano schools or districts. Similar findings were reported by Espinosa and Garcia (1976) in a recent study of the State of California.

The second report, The Unfinished Education: Outcomes for Minorities in the Five Southwestern States, documents the failure of schools to educate Chicano and other minority students, as evidenced by reading achievement levels, drop-out rates, grade repetition, "overageness," and participation in extracurricular activities. The researchers found that,

> minority students in the Southwest -- Mexican Americans, blacks, American Indians -- do not obtain the benefits of public education at a rate equal to that of their Anglo classmates. This is true regardless of the measure of school achievement used (p. 41).

The third report, the Excluded Student: Educational Practices Affecting Mexican Americans in the Southwest, examines the practices of schools in dealing with the unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of Chicano students. The Commission finds that schools use various "exclusionary practices" which deny Chicano students use of the Spanish language, pride in their ethnic heritage, and the direct support of their community.

The fourth report, Mexican American Education in Texas: A Function of Wealth, describes ways in which the school finance system in Texas works to the detriment of districts in which Chicano students are concentrated. The basic finding is that the amount of money spent to educate Chicano students is three-fifths that spent in the education of Anglo pupils.

The fifth report, Teachers and Students: Classroom Interaction in the Schools of the Southwest, measures the extent to which differences exist in the verbal interactions of teachers toward their Chicano and their Anglo students. The major findings of this report were also published in a journal article, Jackson and Cosca (1974). The Commission concludes that the schools are failing to involve Chicano students to the same extent as Anglo pupils.

The sixth and final report of this series, Toward Quality Education for Mexican Americans, focuses more attention on specific problems in the education of Chicano students and recommends actions at various governmental and educational levels which may alleviate these problems.

Again, these six reports constitute the most comprehensive and extensive documentation of the Chicano experience with schooling in the Southwest. If there is one piece of work which stands above all others, this is it.

Other key materials in the study of Mexican-American education in the Southwest are: Demos (1962), Fernández (1977), Hernandez (1973), and Weinberg (1977, chapter 11). These four publications offer substantial summaries and reviews of various topics within the area of Chicanos and education in the borderlands.

ACHIEVEMENT

One area in which the research is conclusive and convincing is that of educational outcomes. Studies consistently find that on almost any school outcome variable (as measured by traditional methods) Chicano students tend to do less well than Anglo students. Chicanos, as a group, score lower on both verbal and math achievement tests, have higher dropout rates, are less likely to graduate from high school, and attend college in fewer numbers. Also, fewer graduate from college or attend graduate and professional schools (e.g., Carter, 1970; Coleman et al., 1966; Espinosa et al., 1975 and forthcoming; Fernández et al., 1975; Gordon et al., 1968; Grebler, 1967; Jensen, 1961; Manuel, 1965; Sánchez, 1932; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, report #2, 1971.)

Explanations advanced to account for these differences have tended to focus on the family or the culture. The family and/or the culture have been viewed as the "damaging causes" of the lower performance of Chicano students. These models, "family-is-damaging" and "culture-is-damaging," have also been employed to explain differences in school outcomes between Blacks and Anglos and between Native Americans and Anglos in the Southwest. These models

do not offer a convincing explanation, especially since the same school outcome differences are found between middle and lower SES Anglos. Yet, such explanations tend to persist. These types of explanations were especially prevalent in the 1920's to 1940's literature on race and intelligence (Vaca, 1970). Sociological and psychological writings of this period are filled with assertions of the intellectual inferiority of Chicanos (Weinberg, 1977). It has only been recently that a set of literature has accumulated which implicitly and explicitly questions the earlier family/culture deprivation models (e.g., Armstrong, 1972; Berton and Clasen, 1971; California State Department of Education, 1969; Castañeda, 1974; Davis and Personke, 1968; Fernández et al., 1975; Galvan, 1967; Hernández, 1970; Kuvlesky and Juarez, 1975; Mercer, 1971; Moreno, 1970; Ortega, 1971; Ramírez and Castañeda, 1974; Romano, 1968; Vasquez, 1972; Vogler, 1968). This recent research unequivocably demonstrates that, due to the language, class, and cultural biases of the measures, I.Q. tests are not reliable means for assessing intelligence among the Chicano population.

Few models have been advanced in terms of structural factors (e.g., economic standing, quality of education, institutional discrimination, etc.) to explain the lower academic status of Chicanos. It is a well known and accepted fact that socioeconomic factors have a direct effect on educational outcomes and that Chicanos tend to be overrepresented in the lower strata, however little work has been done in analyzing these effects for Chicanos. Furthermore, discrimination, intentional or unintentional, affects the chances for success of Chicanos in the educational system. Yet, little attention has been given to these variables in relation to Chicano students. In my view, structural explanations and research on these factors will

prove more fruitful both in accounting for the ethnic differences and in alleviating the differences.

SELF-CONCEPT AND ASPIRATIONS

Self-concept is a common variable associated with the low academic status of Chicano and Native American students. It is argued that Chicano and Native American pupils have lower self-esteem than Anglo students due to discrimination, cultural conflict, and their subordinate status in the larger society. However, a search of the literature reveals mixed findings. As Fernández (1977) and Hernández (1973) have noted, the question, "Do Mexican-American students have lower self-concepts than Anglo students?" remains largely unanswered.

Numerous studies report a significant difference in the academic self-evaluations of Chicanos and Anglos, with Chicano students holding lower views of their academic abilities (e.g., Coleman et al., 1966; Firma, 1970; Gustafson and Owens, 1971; Hishiki, 1969; Mabry, 1968; Palomares, 1968). Other studies report no significant differences in self-concept between the two groups (e.g., Carter, 1968; DeBlassie and Healy, 1970; Dornbush et al., 1974; Larkin, 1972; Linton, 1972; Valenzuela, 1971).

No doubt some of the variability in the findings is due to the different designs of the studies and to the numerous instruments used for measuring self-concept. Yet it is conceivable that both sets of findings are accurate. One can even envision studies which find that Chicano students have higher self-concepts than Anglos as Soares and Soares (1969) claim. That is, what needs to be researched in the future and in great detail are the conditions under which self-concepts differ for minority groups vis-à-vis the dominant group. What environmental factors account for the different findings?

What structural conditions must exist in order for the ethnic differences to disappear? Further work is needed before these and such questions may be answered. This research is urgently needed since it is a well-documented fact that self-concepts are directly related to achievement.

Aspirations is another variable that has often been linked to academic achievement. It is argued that high educational and occupational aspirations of both students and parents result in higher motivation on the part of the student and this motivation, in turn, results in higher achievement. This proposition has been generally supported by research.

In the case of Chicano students in the borderlands, the findings are fairly consistent. The earlier literature took for granted the "fatalistic" and "present day" orientation aspect of the Mexican-American stereotype and thus assumed that Chicanos had low aspirations. Research findings strongly challenge this belief. Although a few studies (Demos, 1962; Mabry, 1968) report lower aspirations for Chicano students and parents than for Anglos, most research, particularly the more recent work, finds no significant differences in level of aspirations between these two ethnic groups (Anderson and Johnson, 1971; Johnson, 1970; Juarez and Kuvlesky, 1969; Heller, 1964).

The latter findings are encouraging. Chicano students care about their schooling and they are supported in their view of school as important by their parents. However, we cannot place too great an emphasis on this one factor. It is unrealistic to believe that Mexican-American students will reach their high educational and occupational aspirations. The basic problem still remains: the large disparity between Chicano and Anglo achievement. Schools must find a means for preparing minority students for the professional careers these students aspire to.

BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL EDUCATION

Bilingual/bicultural education is the latest method employed by the schools in an attempt to raise the educational achievement of Chicano students. Bilingual/bicultural education can be defined as, "instruction in two languages used concurrently within the classroom with emphasis on the history and culture associated with [both] languages" (Aguirre and Fernández, 1976-77:19). Clearly this type of instruction is relevant and essential in the education of Mexican-American students in the borderlands. It has been estimated that about 50 percent of the Chicano first-graders in the Southwest do not speak English as well as the average Anglo first-grader (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1972:14). Furthermore, Chicano and Anglo cultures differ radically on various dimensions. Thus, there is a tremendous need for bilingual/bicultural education.[3] Yet, bilingual/bicultural education as currently applied to Chicanos (and Native Americans) in the Southwest is destined for failure. Let me explain why.

Currently there is a great deal of confusion about the goals, content and methods of bilingual/bicultural education. Fishman (1977:27-30) has identified three categories of bilingual/bicultural education -- compensatory, enrichment, and group maintenance. Compensatory. Programs in this area are geared to overcoming "diseases of the poor." The primary goal is to increase overall achievement by using the mother tongue (Spanish) for instruction until the child develops skill in the dominant language (English) to the point that it (English) alone can be used as the medium of instruction. Enrichment. Programs of this type are most often geared for the middle and upper social classes. The foremost goal is to enrich the education (and lives) of these children by exposing them to different languages and

cultures. Group Maintenance. Programs in this category are geared to the preservation and enhancement of minority groups as such, poor or rich.

Now, the major reason why bilingual/bicultural education in the U.S. and particularly in the Southwest is destined for failure is because it is viewed and applied in compensatory terms. The U.S. government supports bilingual/bicultural education for compensatory (achievement) reasons, not to maintain and promote cultural and group diversity. However, compensatory programs applied merely as transitional or remedial will not succeed in substantially raising the achievement of Chicano students. When applied in this way, bilingual/bicultural education is only a gimmick with, at most, a short term effect. These types of programs will continue to alienate Mexican-American children from their home, community, and the larger society. Furthermore, policy makers and school administrators (as well as some of the advocates) currently view bilingual/bicultural education as a cure-all for the low academic status of Chicano students in the Southwest. This kind of burden will only contribute to the failure of these programs. It is unrealistic to believe that bilingual/bicultural education will amerliorate the diverse problems. There are many other factors which directly and indirectly contribute to this ethnic group's low success rate in schools (e.g., socioeconomic status, prejudice and discrimination, power) which bilingual/bicultural education does not affect.

Bilingual/bicultural education of the compensatory type will not fulfill the educational needs of students in the borderlands. Only when these programs have cultural maintenance and enrichment as their primary focus will we be assured of their success (i.e., positive effects).

CONCLUSIONS

At most, what has been done in this essay represents an effort which explores a few facets of the Chicano experience in the educational system of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Without belaboring the issue, if one considers the number of publications available reflective of the Chicano experience in education, one might logically (though falsely) conclude that Chicanos, as a group, have not had a distinct experience in schools. It's a sad commentary on the current state of the field to learn that the literature available to interested teachers and researchers is minimal. That which is available generally parallels this minority group's experience in the borderland schools: inferior in quantity and quality. Currently the published material falls far short of providing a basis for comprehensive assessment of the problems noted above, or a basis for formulation of policies to ameliorate these problems.

In the future, more attention needs to be focused on the Chicano experience in education. Specifically, more and higher quality research is necessary, particularly regarding structural factors. We need to develop more powerful and humane theoretical models to study, understand and explain the Chicano experience in education. Chicanos have had, and continue to have an educational experience which is demonstrably different from both the majority group's experience and from the experiences of other minority groups.

Finally, the problems of Chicano students run deeper than the schools. The educational system is only one part of a larger social system. Schools are not isolated units. They operate within and reflect the larger society. The larger society, and thus the schools, expect and accept the lower

level of achievement by Chicano students and therefore have not been very responsive to these students. We can be sure that if a large proportion of Anglo students were not succeeding in schools that the educational system would be restructured with an utmost urgency to eradicate the problems. Unfortunately the larger society and the educational system do not respond this rapidly to the special needs of minority groups. The end to the problems of schooling in the borderlands is not yet in sight.

FOOTNOTES

1. This estimate as well as the others in this introductory section are taken from pages 15-20 of "Ethnic Isolation of Mexican Americans in the Public Schools of the Southwest." Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1971.

2. Nearly 20 percent of the total Catholic school enrollment (elementary through secondary) in the Southwest is Chicano.

3. It can also be argued that bilingual/bicultural education is just as necessary on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Of course, the primary reasons here are international exchange and communication. Much of the population in border towns (e.g., Tijuana, Nogales, C. Juarez, Nuevo Laredo) is already bilingual due to economic necessity. The schools would do well to encourage formal instruction of this type on both sides of the border.

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Table 1*

Ethnic breakdown of enrollment in the Southwest.

State	Anglo		Mexican American		Black		Other		Total	
	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number	Percent of Total Enrollment	Number	Percent
California	3,323,478	74.2	646,282	14.4	387,978	8.7	119,642	2.7	4,477,381	100.0
Texas	1,617,840	64.4	505,214	20.1	379,813	15.1	7,492	0.3	2,510,358	100.0
New Mexico	142,092	52.4	102,994	38.0	5,658	2.1	20,295	7.5	271,040	100.0
Arizona	262,526	71.6	71,748	19.6	15,783	4.3	16,402	4.4	366,459	100.0
Colorado	425,749	82.0	71,348	13.7	17,797	3.4	4,198	0.8	519,092	100.0
Southwest	5,771,684	70.9	1,397,586	17.2	807,030	9.9	168,030	2.0	8,144,330	100.0

*Source: p. 17, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1971.

Figure 1*

Major concentrations of Chicano students in the Southwest.

*Source: p. 19, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1971.

Table 2*

Number and percent of enrollment in the Southwest by school level and ethnicity.

	Elementary		Intermediate		Secondary		All School Levels	
Ethnic Group	Number of Pupils	Percent of Total Pupils	Number of Pupils	Percent of Total Pupils	Number of Pupils	Percent of Total Pupils	Number of Pupils	Percent of Total Pupils
Anglos	3,209,813	68.8	1.043,391	71.6	1,518,480	75.3	5,771,684	70.9
Mexican Americans	866,774	18.6	233,106	16.0	297,707	14.8	1,397,586	17.2
Blacks	490,264	10.5	154,261	10.5	162,505	8.1	807,030	9.9
Others	101,809	2.1	27,060	1.9	39,162	1.9	168,030	2.0
TOTAL	4,668,660	100.0	1,457,818	100.0	2,017,854	100.0	8,144,330	100.0

*Source: p. 18, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1971.